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LIBYA

INTERVIEW WITH MU'AMMAR AL-QADHDHAFI

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[Passages enclosed in slantlines printed in italics]

[Text] When I arrive, the /guide of the revolution/ is ensconced in his camp, Aziziya headquarters, protected by armored tanks and blocks of reinforced cement through which my driver must negotiate. The /man of the desert/ takes on an imperial air in his tent, amid rugged surroundings. Stately, a little theatrical, like all Bedouins, Mu'ammār al-Qadhdfafi (his surname means /builder/), the /terrorist/ who has the world's leaders trembling, speaks with a voice worthy of the Comedie Francaise. He knows perfectly well what people say about him, and he responds to it all. Those who call him /crazy/ are mistaken. Clearly he is malicious, astute, following his own logic. His father Amoumediar used to say that he was at once quick-witted, pensive and quiet. As a youth he was flashy and boisterous. As he grew older, he developed a propensity for loud proclamations. But now he has become more mistrustful, suspicious, obsessed with politics, blindly determined, and religious to the point of piety. He does not smoke or drink. He is a soldier, a thinker, a man of action. He appears worried. Two problems are of the utmost importance to Qadhdfafi right now: Chad and terrorism.

His answers reveal what concerns him: He wants to make it possible for his protegee, Goukouni Oueddei, to have free rein. Oueddei is champing at the bit in his impatience to test France and probably to resume negotiations. He knows that Moscow does not abstain from giving advice directly to the leaders of the Oueddei Provisional National Union (GUNT). A sudden flare-up in Chad would certainly divert attention at least momentarily from the massacres in Afghanistan.

Terrorism to Spread

There were a lot of people in Tripoli when I was there: ferocious-looking Palestinians, enlightened ayatollahs, revolutionaries of all stripes. Qadhdfafi chaired the meeting of the high /Revolutionary Command of the Arab Nation,/ that is, 22 of the most extremist organizations. Thus, I was able to observe all the /hardliners/ of the Palestinian resistance: Abu Nizar, the sidekick of "public enemy number one;" Abu Nidal, Marbache, Hawatmeh, Jibril, Abu Moussa. These skyjackers and bomb-planters, furious that the Israelis

were able to divert a Libyan plane, have declared a war without quarter on the Zionists and their American protectors. And they have announced that they will blow up all civilian aircraft of the Jewish state and the United States. Also present were Iraqi opponents of Saddam Hussein, adversaries of the moderate Arab regimes, Iranian assassins. In sum, the entire /Gotha/ of terrorism was there..

No one here believed for a minute that the U.S. aircraft carriers /Coral Sea/ and /Saratoga,/ which were patrolling off the Libyan coasts, could launch an attack while 2,000 Americans are living here under circumstances that are much more privileged than those enjoyed by other foreigners, such as the 1,000 Frenchmen, the 8,000 Italians, and the /12,000 Soviet advisers./ But this demonstration has served to provoke all those who want to destroy capitalist society.

[Question] So you support the new position taken by these extremists?

[Answer] One thing I do know is that the war between the Palestinians and the Zionists has been going on since 1936, and that the Americans have consistently encouraged Israel's violence. Therefore, the Palestinians are obliged to follow suit.

[Question] How do you explain the fact that this Palestinian-Israeli war is exporting terrorism to the Western nations?

[Answer] The problem is that there are no particular rules for managing violence. It is the Israelis who first moved this war outside of Palestine. In my opinion, both sides are responsible for what you call /terrorism./

(Indeed, Libya has proposed that an international conference be convened to define the difference between acts of war and terrorism.)

[Question] Do you accept, then, mid-air explosions of aircraft with innocent victims on board?

[Answer] That decision is up to the Palestinians.

[Question] What about the indiscriminate bombings in Paris?

[Answer] Some wars fall within the context of this Palestinian-Israeli war, and others are outside the Palestinian context. I consider participants in the latter to be terrorists. For example, the bombs in Kuwait, and the latest bombings in Paris. These are clear acts of terrorism.

[Question] And what is your attitude toward this kind of terrorism?

[Answer] I repudiate it unconditionally.

[Question] You always talk about the /Arab nation,/ but the Arabs never stop fighting among themselves.

[Answer] That is simple. Imagine France divided into 22 states, most of them occupied by a foreign country. At a given moment the Israelis take over Bordeaux (/Qadhdhafi has read my dossier and knows that I was born there/). Do you think there could be unanimity to kick out the invader?

[Question] Finally, then, no one wants that unity, much less the great powers?

[Answer] Exactly. But we must distinguish between the superpowers. The Americans are imperialists; the Soviets can be considered friends. Believe me, however: Libya is not in the Soviet camp. On the contrary, it is among the non-aligned countries. Therefore, it is not necessary for Libya to be in complete agreement with Moscow. We are alert, and we are prudent.

Specter, utopia, dream, lie. There is a little of all this in the enigmatic Qadhdhafi. He asserts, among other things, that he has nothing to do with international terrorism, while numerous sources claim that there are 18 terrorist training camps in his territory. He denies it. According to him, a deliberately aggressive element of the press is telling these stories. A controlled, directed press. It is almost always very close to the positions of Libya's enemies. In revenge, Qadhdhafi has often officially supported liberation movements: Obviously, for him the Palestinians are the highest priority; then there are the /Polisario/ (although he has cut off that aid since his /alliance/ with Hassan II), the revolutionaries in Ethiopia before Mengistu, those in Guinea-Bissau, those in Mozambique, those in Rhodesia, the Moro Muslims in the Philippines, the IRA, and even, a few years ago, the /Black Panthers/ in the United States. He is extremely discreet with regard to the Afghan resistance. In all these cases, he does not specify whether the bombings are acts of war or of terrorism.

/Libya might well not have existed. It is Qadhdhafi who has made it a modern state, overthrowing the old and corrupt King Idris who was allied with Great Britain. Libya is three times as big as France, and has 3 million inhabitants, half of them foreigners. Seventy percent of its territory is desert. Oil is its only resource. The saturation of the oil market has caused it to lose 50 percent of its financial revenues. The coastal strip is now a hotbed of activity: refineries, steel plants, model farms. Its Navy (80,000 men, plus 10,000 volunteers from all the Arab and African states, wretches struggling for survival who have joined the Islamic Legion) is disproportionately large. It has 550 jet fighters (of which 100 are French Mirages; France is Libya's second-largest supplier of weapons after the Soviet Union), 3,000 tanks, 4,000 artillery pieces, and all kinds of missiles. Its military budget amounts to more than 26 percent of the gross national product. Mu'ammar Qadhdhafi is a mystic, but not a fundamentalist. He is above all a believer and a thinker; he has come up with a third path (his Green Book) between capitalism and socialism. Power belongs to the people through consultation, popular committees and congresses of the masses. Therefore there is no parliament or deputies (who betray the people), nor are there elections. He goes regularly to the desert to meditate. His faith is unshakable. He has survived four attempts on his life./

Socialist Messianism

Socialist messianism is not peculiar to him. The /French Socialist Party/ began to do the same thing the day after its victory in 1981. Our Socialists were ready to support the battles of all guerrillas throughout the world. It is also true that now Qadhdhafi has made the Tripoli Airport off limits to air pirates. The man cannot be classified as completely black or white. But it is true that portraying him constantly as the great orchestrator of international terrorism hides the true culprits. We must look in other places: in Syria, where Hafez al-Assad is lighting fuses all over the Middle East; in Iran, where Khomeini is continuing his blackmail with the four French hostages; and in Moscow, which holds the record for air piracy, having killed the 289 passengers of the Korean Airlines flight in mid-air, and having tried to assassinate the Pope. I left Qadhdhafi, and he went off to pray in the desert, 400 kilometers from Tripoli. Thus he renewed his religious quest, his crazy dream of an Islamic republic extending from the Atlantic to the Red Sea.

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